

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Elements of Reading: Vocabulary

### What is Elements of Reading: Vocabulary?

*Elements of Reading: Vocabulary (Vocabulary)* is an oral vocabulary instruction program, designed for kindergarten through third grade students. *Vocabulary* is based on research and written by Drs. Isabel L. Beck and Margaret G. McKeown. *Vocabulary* is one component of a modular reading program by Steck-Vaughn, an imprint of Harcourt Achieve. Each of the components: Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension, and Phonemic Awareness and Phonics have been flexibly designed to use together or separately for supplementing specific areas of need. The focus of this report is *Vocabulary*.

Beck, McKeown, and Linda Kucan's years of research and classroom practice are depicted in their book, Bringing Words to Life. This widely read book has become the catalyst that inspired the creation of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*. The authors' love of words combined with their research findings comprise the rationale for the content and strategies presented in *Vocabulary*. The presentation of rich, robust words that are not ordinarily found in a young child's speaking vocabulary but would most probably be in their conceptual lexicon is the hallmark feature of the program. Understanding the concept that children must be encouraged to take pleasure in language, and that new vocabulary words must be repeatedly heard and used in a variety of contexts before they become fixed in their vocabulary is the underlying theme of the instructional techniques presented in *Vocabulary*.

The program's layout, design, and pedagogy are consistent through out the grade level sequence. A scope and sequence for every level (K-3) is presented in each of the Teacher's Guides. Standards for vocabulary, comprehension, writing, as well as the genre of each read aloud, are included in the scope and sequence.

While the program is designed to be taught to the whole class by the regular classroom teacher, teachers may choose to adapt all or portions of each lesson for small group instruction. Lesson implementation will require approximately 20 minutes a day. Each lesson begins with a read aloud selection from the anthology followed by a discussion of the new vocabulary words. The new words are posted on the Word Watcher Chart and tally marks are used to record the students' use of the words throughout the week. On day 2, photo cards that express the concept of the vocabulary words are presented to prompt engaging activities and discussion. Attention is focused on linking the words to the children's experiences. On day 3, interactive workbook activities provide the opportunity to use the words in various contexts. Graphic organizers are used to reinforce the meanings of the vocabulary words on day 4. An oral review, a weekly assessment, and a cumulative assessment encompass the lesson on day 5.

Each grade level kit is stored in a tote box and contains: the Teacher's Guide which includes comprehensive lesson and instructional techniques for vocabulary instruction, the Read-Aloud Anthology with twenty-four selections of children's literature that span a variety of genre, a set of photo cards that illustrate the vocabulary words by depicting children in realistic photographs, the word watcher chart used as a motivational springboard for encouraging the students to



document their daily use of the vocabulary words, and a student workbook to be used interactively with the teacher led activities and assessments. The materials are well organized and error free however, the flexibility in design causes some confusion as to when to first present the vocabulary words in the read aloud anthology.

The assessment piece in each lesson begins with a teacher directed oral review followed by a written assessment in the student workbook. The assessment format affords students practice for standardized tests (teachers read the assessment to kindergarten and first grade students). A cumulative review that combines the words from the previous week with the current vocabulary words for an oral assessment is found in the Teacher's Guide. The Word Watcher Chart provides an informal assessment tool, as teachers hear and analyze their student's acquisition of the words throughout the week.

### How are the Elements of Reading: Vocabulary aligned with Reading First?

Traditional vocabulary instruction has been focused on teaching the words that students need to know in order to gain meaning from the material they are reading (e.g., teaching *peninsula* to understand the geographic description of the state of Florida). Typically, students have learned definitions, but have not been provided rich experiences in using words in a variety of contexts. So, although most educators assumed they were teaching vocabulary, they were in fact doing little to actually insure the acquisition of words. Realization of the need for direct vocabulary instruction targeted on words that will be most productive for expanding children's reading vocabulary led the authors to identify three tiers of words. Tier one words are the basic words found in most children's spoken vocabulary, words such as book, house, and baby. These words are used frequently and their meanings don't usually need to be taught (with the exception of students with limited English proficiency). Tier three words are used in specific arenas so are not used as often and are not as productive to teach in general vocabulary lessons. Words such as *cumulus* and *isotope* are considered tier three words, and should be taught in the context of specific lessons in science, etc. Second tier words such as *occurrence* and *scrumptious* are used frequently and across many situations for expression in writing and to gain knowledge when reading. These words are often missing from the vocabularies of young children, but the underlying concepts they express are already understood. Thus, the second tier words were chosen for the explicit vocabulary instruction that is found in *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*.

The program format is systematic with weekly lessons that are closely patterned after the activities described in Bringing Words to Life. The program embodies excellent literature that spans a variety of genres and is used to introduce the new vocabulary. Explaining the concepts of the words using every day language, not stiff dictionary definitions, and connecting the words to known concepts is an important part of the program. Photo cards are used to depict the concepts the words represent as they relate to the students' experiences. The program also includes a systematic method of providing repeated exposure to the words through lively activities and discussions to ensure the words become fixed in the students' vocabulary. The spontaneous use of the words among the children is celebrated through the Word Watcher Chart. Finally, parents are encouraged to become involved with the oral vocabulary development their children are experiencing at school through take home letters and a web-based parent place that provides activities for reinforcement.

Although, the content and activities for teaching vocabulary are explicitly described within each component of the lesson, there is some confusion regarding the method of delivery. Explicit professional development to direct educators in the best practice of delivery would strengthen this aspect of the program.

The professional development that is offered when a school or district purchases *Vocabulary* will vary according to the level of implementation. These levels include a simple half-day program implementation training conducted by the sales representative, a full day training conducted by consultant staff, and additional consultant services for larger implementations. The simple implementation training encompasses an introduction of the materials, management, getting started, and a walk through. District personnel may request specific adjustments, as program consultants will accommodate the needs while maintaining the integrity of the content in *Vocabulary*. *Vocabulary* does not require specific levels of implementation for purchasing. The fidelity of implementation is insured when teachers follow the strategies and routines that are specified in the teacher materials.

### Research Support for Elements of Reading: Vocabulary



*Vocabulary* became available in January 2004, and is solidly based on research that is linked to the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2000) in the area of vocabulary development. Introducing robust vocabulary words through rich literature, explicit vocabulary instruction, oral instruction, personalization and active engagement, multiple contexts, ample practice, and links to reading comprehension are the cornerstones of this program. Although the program is too new to have empirical research, the content and the design of the program are solidly based on the latest reading research. Furthermore, many of the specific activities contained in the program have been shown by the authors, in their own scientific research on vocabulary development, to produce vocabulary development that generalizes to have an effect on reading comprehension.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*:

- High quality, realistic photo cards used for compare and contrast activities promote the use of the vocabulary words.
- Oral vocabulary instruction is systematic and explicit.
- The program design encourages repeated use of the vocabulary words.

Weaknesses of *Elements of Reading: Vocabulary*:

- The instructional delivery lends itself to whole group response answers, which negatively affects the teacher's ability to insure individual mastery of the vocabulary words. However, the weekly assessment piece in the student book may, in part, overcome this.

### Which Florida districts have schools that implement Vocabulary?

St. Lucie

772-429-3925

## For More Information

[www.harcourtachieve.com](http://www.harcourtachieve.com)

## References

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002) *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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Please send comments about this report to Marcia L. Grek, Ph.D.: [reports@fcrr.org](mailto:reports@fcrr.org)